

11-1978

## Mission: Vol. 12, No. 5

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### Recommended Citation

(1978) "Mission: Vol. 12, No. 5," *Mission*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 5 , Article 1.  
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# MISSION

NOVEMBER 1978

## GIVE WINGS TO THE WOMEN

“The woman was given  
the two wings of the  
great eagle that she  
might fly....” (Rev. 12:14)



# IN THE MARGINS

The '70s, they tell us, are not a time for causes. Students are studying for income-producing jobs instead of rioting on campus. Screaming banners are out, bumper stickers for Jesus are in. What with Watergate and all, idealism is out, cynicism is in. A once-vocal leader in the women's rights movement told me recently that she is tired of it all.

I'm not so sure that this is detrimental to true causes. Their more inflammatory stages catch the headlines and set trends. But the real gains in worthy causes are often slower burning, lower profile. Instead of erupting, they grow—with patient and persistent nurturing.

Hence this special issue on the role of women in the church, even though some are weary of the battle. Haven't all the slogans been painted, all the salvos fired, all the flags waved, and all the troops holed up to rigid entrenchments on one side or the other?

Well, maybe. But, like the kingdom of heaven, the violent stage in the women's movement is only one phase, the time when "men of violence take it by force." There remains the growth and nurturing of the seed the size of a mustard seed, until it is the size of a tree—or of the full-grown will of God. There remains the learning process in which churches where women are free learn not to boast, and churches where women are bound learn not to condemn and cast out of the kingdom. It is in such hopes that we continue to focus on this important issue, which will not soon go away.

Of course there is danger in giving women a greater role in the church. It is that we men, frequently half-hearted about church at best, will be only too willing for the girls to take over. After all, they are doing much of the work now, except for the "public" part. If that happens, we can only pray for a Deborah to come along and challenge the men to respond with greater courage.

Wouldn't that be just like a (biblical) woman?

-Rd

TO EXPLORE THOROUGHLY THE SCRIPTURES AND THEIR MEANING . . . TO UNDERSTAND AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE THE WORLD IN WHICH THE CHURCH LIVES AND HAS HER MISSION . . . TO PROVIDE A VEHICLE FOR COMMUNICATING THE MEANING OF GOD'S WORD TO OUR CONTEMPORARY WORLD."

—EDITORIAL POLICY STATEMENT, JULY, 1967

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VOLUME 12, NUMBER 5

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Published monthly by Mission Journal, Inc., 1710 W. Airport Freeway, Irving, Texas 75062. Publication No. 352880. Annual subscription \$8, three years \$20, five years \$30. Annual student rate \$5. Bundle and bound volume rates on request. Single copies \$1. Second class postage paid at Irving, Texas, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send address changes to Mission Journal, 11223 Henge Drive, Austin, Texas 78759, which is also the address for all circulation and bookkeeping correspondence.

# Scripture's Restrictive Strand

By ROY WILLBERN

In Bible oriented churches there are generally two attitudes about the role of women in the church. There are variations within each attitude and even some encroachment and merging between the two.

(1) There is the attitude that says women must be (a) veiled, (b) silent, and (c) submissive. This attitude takes literally 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:34-35; and 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

From this literal stance some concessions have been made by some congregations. The veil or covering has been interpreted as a hat, with Paul's injunction overlooked on the ground that "customs" change. "Silent" is not taken to include congregational singing, nor to women teaching other women or unbaptized children. "Submission," however, nearly always means submission—especially to husbands, preachers, and elders.

(2) There is also the attitude that "submission" alone is the limiting factor in the role of women. This attitude accepts readily that the veil is entirely a cultural matter and no longer applies today; and/or it equates "veiled" with "submission" and leans on 1 Corinthians 11 to allow a woman to speak when it is approved by, and under submission to, men.

This attitude can be limited in application (as it is in most churches), or broadened to permit virtually any type of vocal participation by women. Discussion in mixed classes, women making oral reports, women praying aloud with men and so on are variously permitted as long as it is clear that such participation does not "usurp authority" and is in submission.

In the February 1978 issue of *Mission*, Bill Vermillion outlines practical ways to implement this second attitude. He accepts that the injunction for women to "learn in silence" (1 Tim. 2:11-12) means "authority relationships, not physical noises." And while accepting "as a basic principle that God intends the male to be the head of the

family," he urges that the key concept in such leadership is love.

This attitude still stops short of allowing women speaking participation in the formal, public worship of the church. The fear is that such participation would be "usurpation" and would be considered a violation of 1 Corinthians 14:34, even though the congregation understood that such speaking was not intended as being outside women's submissive role. Yet this position, which has really evolved from the first, more restrictive, stance, might very well develop as a matter of custom over the years toward real participation of women in situations of virtual equality with men.

Some thoughtful students are not comfortable with either of these attitudes. They feel that God's revelation points to a third attitude toward the role of women in the church. And it is this third attitude that I wish to consider here.

At the outset, the following facts confront us:

(1) A growing number of Christian young women and young men are coming to assert that the restrictive practices of fundamentalist groups in keeping women down are inconsistent with the spirit of Jesus Christ. They are imbued with the philosophy of equality and freedom taught and practiced by society generally, including a large portion of religious leadership. This fact demands that fundamentalist leadership restudy its traditional stance requiring subordination of women and modify its practices in the direction of freedom and dignity.

The traditional alternative, persuasion that woman's subordinate role is consistent with the nature of Christ and the overwhelming spirit of all God's revelation, has not been satisfactorily argued, in my opinion. The basic implication here is that movement in the direction of freedom and dignity must take place soon or many Christians will quietly shift to religious groups where freedom is available.

(2) A literal reading of all Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, results in difficult inconsistencies. The implication of this fact will be developed at length in this article.

(3) Change toward more freedom for women in the

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churches represents a serious psychological threat—deep, irrational, and non-negotiable to many men and to some women.

(4) A study of this issue will largely focus on one's attitude toward the Scriptures, toward the nature and meaning of revelation, toward philosophies of interpretation. It is a problem in hermeneutics—what Scripture should mean today—rather than simple exegesis—what it meant originally.

(5) Growth in understanding this issue promises tremendous hope for the inner health of the church. Until we cope successfully with this problem, we are seriously paralyzed in our efforts to communicate Christ to an unbelieving world.

**There are two apparently inconsistent threads of biblical references to the male/female situation. The threads must be considered separately with no effort to harmonize the obvious differences, in order to better understand each strand on its own ground.**

Let us now examine the Scriptures with due regard to where, when, by whom, and under what circumstances they were written. Let us try to grasp the historical and sociological setting. Let us try to understand specific verses in context and in the light of the spirit and meaning of all the Bible.

This analysis will admittedly be subjective. The conclusions which I state will represent my interpretation of the message which I perceive as the Holy Spirit speaks to me through my study of the Scriptures. And I suggest that this is the only way it can be. Any student who searches the Scriptures must come to responsible personal conclusions. The nature of revelation is that God confronts every man with the reality of the life and appearing of his Son. The Bible, which witnesses to that Christ-event, demands a personal decision and a subjective response from every reader.

There are two apparently inconsistent threads of biblical references to the male/female situation which make their way through the Scriptures. Both start in Genesis with the creation stories, and each surfaces here and there, down to the latest books of the New Testament canon. Generally, scholars desiring to eliminate difficulty and apparent confusion endeavor to reconcile the two threads. In this phase of our study, however, the threads will be considered separately with no effort to harmonize or reconcile the obvious differences, in order to better understand each strand on its own ground.

The first thread consists of the Jewish "order of creation" references. Our opening text is 1 Corinthians 11:3, where the apostle Paul says, "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God." This line of scriptures begins with the second creation story in Genesis 2:7, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." "And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper

fit for him' " (2:18). "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man. . . and he took one of his ribs . . . [and] the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man" (2:21-22).

Another basis for Jewish ranking of man above woman has its origin in Genesis 3:6:

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.

The Jews blamed woman for the sin, and God reinforced this idea by saying to the woman "And thy desire shall

be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."

Throughout Jewish history, man was elevated and woman's position deteriorated. The patriarchal centuries established man as head of the clan, the leader of the group, while woman became entrenched in a subordinate role. Peter refers to this in 1 Peter 3:6—"Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord." Save for a very few exceptions, woman's status continued to deteriorate in Jewish custom up to the time of Christ. The oft-quoted Jewish male's prayer, "I thank thee, Lord, that I was not born a gentile, or a woman, or a slave, or an ignorant person," truly reflected the man/woman relationship and attitude of the period.

This "order of creation" thread of scriptures continues in the New Testament. In order to appreciate the force of this line of scriptures I am setting them out in some detail. Most come from the pen of the Apostle Paul, but at least one comes from Peter.

Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. (1 Tim. 2:11-15)

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head—it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. (1 Cor. 11:3-7)

The women should keep silence in the churches. For



they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

(1 Cor. 14:34-35)

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.

(Eph. 5:22)

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

(Col. 3:18)

Train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind and submissive to their husbands, that the work of God may not be discredited.

(Titus 2:4-5)

Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behavior.

(1 Pet. 3:1-2)

With these "order of creation" scriptures as their authority, most Christian theologians readily accepted the concept of male supremacy and responsibility, and female submission and dependence. And the churches incorporated this philosophy into their life and fellowship.

Restoration scholars found Paul's words sufficient basis for the conclusion that women were indeed submissive in the first century church. Hence, churches growing out of the Restoration Movement have been firm in resisting most initiatives to offer women more freedom and opportunities for verbal expression in the church. Indeed, emphasis on literal interpretation of Paul's more restrictive admonitions toward silence and submission caused many churches to inhibit women in praying and learning, on the ground that it is safer to err in the direction of suppression than in the direction of freedom.

Throughout the centuries, however, there has been uneasiness in the minds of many scholars because there are scriptures on the subject that do not fit the pattern of the "order of creation" scriptures cited above. As education has increased, as thoughtful women have searched for personal identity, and as thoughtful men and women have pondered a clearer meaning of full salvation for women as well as men, another line of scriptures has demanded investigation and understanding. This second biblical strand will be the subject of the next installment.

†



## METAMORPHOSIS

By Ben Boothe

*It was good then  
in the beginning  
we had the answers  
all black and white  
we were busy saving the world  
and thought we had no time to think  
... but we thought ... some thought ...  
and we found grey areas  
and weightier matters came front.  
So we fought brave battles,  
Change! we cried  
Grace! Fellowship! Spirit!  
were our battlecries  
some were wounded  
some were scattered.  
And now we ache  
for the changes come ever slowly  
... if ever ...  
and we tire of battles.  
It was good then  
in the beginning ...  
But we could never go back.*



# Backgrounds: How to Treat both Paul and Women with Dignity

From the Editor

It is commonly supposed that to argue for equal participation of women and men in the church is to do violence to the apostle Paul. Some feminists state their case in terms that belittle him as a male chauvinist. We seem to be asked to polarize the Body by choosing to respect either Paul or women; either loyalty to the Bible or to a current social fad; either the "be silent" passages from Corinthians and Timothy, or Galatians 3:28 with its emphasis on equality.

An approach to Paul which takes New Testament backgrounds seriously would lessen this tension. The Restoration Movement had little trouble doing this in the matter of women wearing veils (1 Cor. 11:2ff.). Paul's language is as dogmatic on this issue as on women's equality: "We recognize no other practice" (vs. 16). But we read in our Bible dictionaries or commentaries that unveiled women in Corinth were considered immoral. And we decided, with great hermeneutical risk ("If we ignore this command, what about baptism?"), that since this is not true in our culture we can safely relegate this

command to Paul's culture.

It is important to realize that this step is not *unbiblical*, though it is *extra-biblical*. The fact that unveiled women in Corinth were perhaps considered prostitutes does not leap out at us from the pages of Scripture. But we have learned that to treat the Bible biblically is to ask such questions as who was writing, who was being addressed, etc. That line of questioning takes the *background* into account. Any other approach might be *biblicist*, but it is not *biblical*. It does not deal fairly with either Scripture or our own situation.

## PAUL'S UNIFYING PURPOSE

Why would Paul speak in one context of a woman deacon with the authority to ask of a church "whatever she may require" (Rom. 1:16), then in another place warn that women should not "have authority over men" (1 Tim. 2:12)? Is he simply and thoughtlessly inconsistent? Does the Bible itself confront us with some of those either/or choices?



Not exactly. Paul is driven by an inner logic that supplies his consistency. Again and again he tells us that his one over-riding purpose in life is *to preach the gospel "to the Jew first and also to the Greek"* (Rom. 1:16). The repetition of the order of priorities in this task is important: Paul is told to go *to the Jew first* (see also 2:9, 10). Thus in his missionary travels he typically goes first not to the marketplace but the synagogue. He selects cities with a concentration of Jews. Why? Because God raised up the Messiah and "sent him to [the Jews] *first*," for they are the basis for the people of God (Acts 3:25-26). "It was necessary," therefore, "that the word of God should be spoken *first* to you [Jews]" (Acts 13:26).

It is this consistent priority of aim that, paradoxically, prompts Paul to act in seemingly inconsistent ways. He himself takes the background of each situation seriously. Jewish scruples cause him to have a man circumcised in one context (Acts 16), but Greek freedom leads him to deny it in another (Gal. 2:3). His behavior is not inconsistent, but *contextual*. He knows that ultimately "there is neither Jew nor Greek," but for now his world is very much Jew and Greek. If he is to preach to the Jew first, but also to the Greek, and blend them both in one family of faith, he will have to adjust his approach accordingly.

An examination of the differing status of women in the Jewish and Greek communities to whom Paul preached yields a similar picture.

**It is this consistent priority of aim—to preach the gospel to the Jew first—that, paradoxically, prompts Paul to act in seemingly inconsistent ways. He is not inconsistent, but contextual.**

### JEWISH WOMEN'S STATUS

The generally low estate of Jewish women in the New Testament world has been widely documented, and is referred to in other articles. Roy Willbern notes the Jewish male's prayer which includes praise to God that the man was not born a woman—a good summary statement of the place of women in the Jewish faith at the time.

Jewish women were not allowed to study the Torah, the Law; their best work was considered that of supplying male children who could be

given to that study. Women were not counted in the quorum required for the convening of a recognized synagogue (a situation only magnified when Jewish authors record that at the miracle of the loaves there were about 5,000 *men*, never mind how many women). At the temple in Jerusalem, the Court of the Women lay outside even the Court of the Gentiles. At synagogue services the women were kept safely in a kind of screened-off gallery (where their loud twittering may be controlled by 1 Cor. 14:34).

And remember that quaint, modern wedding piece about woman having been taken not from man's head, nor his foot, but from his side, for protection and companionship? Its predecessor is from the Talmud, which reflects rather ungracious ancient Jewish sentiment about women:

God said, 'I will not create her from the head that she should not hold up her head too proudly; nor from the eye that she should not be a coquette; nor from the ear that she should not be an eavesdropper; nor from the mouth that she should not be too talkative; nor from the heart that she should not be too jealous; nor from the foot that she should not be a gadabout; but from a part of the body which is hidden,' that she should be modest.

(Gen. R. 18:2.)

Legally, the plight of women under Jewish law was notorious. They could be divorced for virtually any cause, but could not bring a divorce suit against their husbands. Women's testimony was not admitted in court because, as the histor-

ian Josephus reasons, "of the levity and boldness of their sex."

It is therefore no surprise that the apostle Paul does not make the equality of women in the New Age his first sermon when he goes "to the Jew first." First, let them hear that they can now be "in Christ" instead of under Moses. Time enough for them then to experience the fact that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bond nor free. For the male/female differences was one of the sharpest distinctions between the two cultures.



## GREEK WOMEN'S LIBERATION

The historical evidence of the status of women in Greek society is uneven. Various liberation movements had met with unequal success. In general, however, their status was frighteningly free to the point of being scandalous, when compared to their Jewish sisters. Long before the time of Christ, Plato had argued that women should have the same political, educational, and military privileges and duties as men. In warlike Sparta, women had fought with distinction beside the men. Most courts received the testimony of women with no qualms, although this trend suffered a set-back under Roman rule.

But of special concern for Paul was the religious dimension of this more permissive society. The Egyptian cult of Isis and Osiris had spread northward, and found popular reception. To their horror, many male Jews found their wives receptive to Isis, who was called "The Glory of Women," and the cult's propaganda that the gods had given women the same potential as men! On hills and in groves, women were gathering unashamedly for public worship, praying and prophesying with no inhibitions.

Unfortunately, much of this pagan worship invited devotees to revelry and the removal of all restraint. Some women had abandoned their families to join one or another of the Greek mystery cults, and to roam wild on the hills at night in

we can understand why Paul orders families to submit to strong male leadership. Two of the strongest passages—Ephesians 5:21ff. and Colossians 3:18ff.—*are significantly directed to areas of Greek culture where these disruptive cults were strongest.* The tension they placed on family life is captured by a summary paragraph from Verena Zinserling:

In addition to established cults, there were swarms of astrologers, miracle-mongers from the East, sorceresses and female poisoners and mediums from Germany who swindled many a woman out of her property, hurled her into the path of vice and crime and ruined her family life. . . . Judaism and Christianity found many adherents among the female members of families, and many a divorce had its origin in religious grounds. (*Women in Greece and Rome*, p. 62.)

## THE RESOLUTION

Women's subordination passages, unsurprisingly, are strongest in the Corinthian and Ephesian settings—two major centers of pagan worship and Jewish settlements. In Corinth, Paul's priority in preaching prompts him to allay potential conflict in the church by commanding the women to delay the exercise of their freedom in Christ. The gospel is to go to the Jews first; and there cannot be a Jewish church vs. a Gentile

**In Corinth, Paul allays potential conflict by commanding the women to delay the exercise of their freedom in Christ. Let the Gentiles be the stronger brother, lest Christianity be tagged with the same excesses as the mystery cults.**

licentious ecstasy. Juvenal, a Roman poet contemporary with the New Testament documents, wrote of such women:

Through ice they beat and plunge into the stream

If so the god has warned them in a dream,

Weak in their limbs, but in devotion strong,

On their bare hands and feet they crawl along

A whole field's length, the laughter of the throng. (II, 6, pp. 522ff., Dryden's transl.)

It would be hard to over-emphasize the extent to which all this disrupted family and community life in the Dispersion, the world in which the Jews found themselves trying to make a life alongside such Gentiles. Against this background

church—there is one Body. Let the Gentiles therefore be the stronger brother, lest Christianity be tagged with the same excesses as the mystery cults.

Recalling that the setting of 1 Timothy is Ephesus, we should recall also that this city was the home of Artemis and the cult of the Great Mother. Some scholars believe the very beginnings of worship in Ephesus are to be traced to an Amazon society. And we know from the Bible itself that the manufacture of images to the goddess Diana was an important industry there (Acts 19:23ff.).

How could Paul possibly blend Jew and Greek in such a city? One way would be to allow only



the men to pray in public (1 Tim. 1:8; Paul deliberately chooses the Greek word for males [*aner*] instead of mankind [*anthropos*]). Further, women are to learn in silence, as they did in the Jewish synagogue (2:11). Only thus can the church—indeed society as a whole—hold together long enough to publish the word that ultimately such distinctions and restrictions would not apply, since in the Lord there is “no male and female.”

Several times Paul indicates that it is this matter of order or propriety, rather than ultimate right or wrong, which underlies his commands. The business of veils at Corinth was a matter of its being “*disgraceful*” in that setting (1 Cor. 11:6). Thus Paul asks not “Is it right?” for them to go unveiled, but “Is it *proper*?” (vs. 13). And in 14:35-36 he points out not that there is some

Certainly these arguments are not “merely cultural.” Nothing is *merely* cultural for Paul. Everything has a theological point. While some things are matters of indifference (cf. eating meats offered to idols), Paul still does not make the neat distinctions between “doctrine” and “opinion” that we do. None of his commands is backed up with a more highly theological argument than the one on veils. He even throws in a mysterious reference to angels watching carefully over the way the matter is handled (vs. 10). Yet we have rightly concluded that our changed context frees us from the total situation, which is a thoroughly homogenized mixture of theology and culture, of the universal and the particular. While we respect Paul’s argument about angels, we do not really know what he meant. We are sure his original hearers knew and accepted it. But it shows

**We must allow Paul the freedom to make arguments—by inspiration—which fit his context, without demanding that they fit ours. His inner logic is not ours; neither are his methods of argument.**

eternal principle at stake, but that “It is *shameful*” for women to speak out in the Corinthian assemblies—even though the Holy Spirit, with his more universal interests, was prompting some to do so (1 Cor. 11:5). And even the demure place of women in the home is, for Paul, “that the word of God may not be *discredited*.” The world was watching. Let no Greek liberation movements, so repugnant to the Jews, rip apart the world. That world, too, must hear the gospel—after the Jews have had their chance.

#### WHAT ABOUT INSPIRATION?

A frequent objection to this line of argument is that Paul’s restrictions on women are not “merely cultural.” In 1 Timothy 2, he seems to support his thesis on the theological fact of Creation and Fall—man was created first, and woman sinned first (vss. 13-14). In Ephesians 5:22-23, wives are to be subject to their husbands not because it would otherwise be scandalous but because it follows the pattern of the subjection of the church to Christ (Eph. 5:22-23). And in 1 Corinthians 11:7 the apostle argues that man, not woman, was created in the image of God, with some implication on the matter of veils in the assembly.

no real respect for Paul to lift the passage out of the context in which it did make sense and apply it in situations where it does not.

Just so must we allow Paul the freedom to make arguments—by inspiration—on the subjection of women which fit his context, without demanding that they fit ours. His inner logic, informed by the priority of preaching to the Jew first and also to the Greek, is not ours; neither are his methods of argument. He makes a traditional rabbinical argument in 1 Corinthians 11, regarding man’s being created in the image of God. In reality, Genesis 1:27 says that both male and female were made in God’s image. What right does Paul have to argue differently? And by what authority does he not place equal blame on man and woman for the Fall, in 1 Timothy 2?

Paul writes by the same authority that he and other New Testament writers use other Old Testament scriptures for the Holy Spirit’s current purposes. Matthew “arbitrarily” divides all of Jewish history from Abraham to Jesus into three periods of fourteen generations each (Matt. 1), conveniently omitting some intervening figures



clearly recorded in the Old Testament. The gospels argue time after time that an Old Testament passage refers to Jesus, when there would be no way to conclude this without their say-so. (Perhaps the most notable example is the "virgin" passage of Isaiah 7:14, which apparently referred originally to the prophet's own son or that of someone else during King Ahaz' reign, but which Matthew applies to the birth of Jesus [Matt. 1: 23].)

Again we ask: By what theory of inspiration might New Testament authors make arguments that offend the sensibilities of modern logic? The answer is that it must be a theory which at least fits the material before us. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers to argue in a way that was true to their original hearers. Were they accustomed to rabbinical twists and turns? Or to symbolic groupings of threes, sevens, and twelves, and their multiples? Or to elaborate word-pictures of falling stars and quaking earths and bloodied moons and multi-headed monsters? Then the Spirit spoke to them in such terms. Little good to have spoken to them in ours!

**The sum of the argument is that the Holy Spirit  
inspired Paul to say whatever would hold together a  
world in flux, while the eternal gospel was preached to  
the Jew first, and also to the Greek.**

And consider the "inconsistency" already mentioned in 1 Corinthians. In one breath Paul tells women how to pray and prophesy appropriately (ch. 11). In the next he tells them to be silent (ch. 14). Once more, an inner consistency informs the superficial discrepancy. I think the Spirit was giving women gifts consistent with the signs that were to accompany the New Age: "your daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18, from Joel 2). This outpouring was too free and powerful to be contained by racial, class, and sexual distinctions. Paul (grudgingly, perhaps) acknowledges this, but he is faced with the task of *implementing* the New Age. He must make the Spirit concrete among flesh and blood people, whose prejudices would not immediately die with the burial of the "old man." Thus, he curbs the practice, for the moment, of the Spirit's gifts to women—just as he counsels the slave Onesimus to return to his master. And he does all this

at the guidance of the same Spirit.

But if we read the New Testament without impressing on it our own logic and canons of consistency, what will happen to its eternal truths? Is there, after all, only chaos and not order in the Bible? Does God have no coherent plan discernible by minds of any age? Is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ also subject to such cultural relativities? Are the skeptics right when they say that the reports of the supreme "events" of the incarnation and the atonement are merely the reflection of that ancient culture?

There is simply no way to avoid the legitimacy of such questions. But they are neither frightening nor new. They can be asked of any writing that purports to report historical events. But the central message of the gospel is placed on quite different grounds than the role of women. The Christ event is treated as a public, historical, witnessed event. While some issues are negotiable (eating meat, marrying, etc.), this one is not; it is worth dying for. Its interpretation as an event with timeless significance does not rest on a

foundation so relative and localized as how unveiled women are viewed in a particular time and place. Rather, it is proclaimed as a faith delivered "once" and "for all" (Jude 3).

The sum of the argument is that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to say whatever would hold together a world in flux, while the eternal gospel was preached to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. By honoring Paul's context, while acknowledging the way his message should eventually erase discrimination on grounds of race, class, and gender, we can treat both Paul and women with dignity.

#### Readings

Marcus Barth, *Ephesians* (The Anchor Bible, vol. 2, pp. 655-662).  
Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, chapter 7.  
Charles Seltman, *Women in Antiquity*.  
"Woman," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 16, pp. 626-27.  
Verena Zinserling, *Women in Greece and Rome*. †



# A 20th Century Parable of the Talents

BY JOYCE HOOD

Behold, there was once a man who owned a prosperous sales firm. He was expanding his business, and therefore had recently hired six new employees.

Vera and Victor had worked in the fast food shop across the street.

Clara and Clifford had been in charge of ready-to-wear departments in the big department store next door.

Maggie and Melvin had been managers of a political campaign. Their candidate had been elected in a landslide victory, so, though exhilarated by success, they were temporarily unemployed. The owner of the business was nervous about hiring these two who had been mixed up in politics, but their recommendations were outstanding. Both had given hundreds of stirring declamations extolling the virtues of their candidate and logically and persuasively justifying his proposed legislative plans. They were talented and tireless in talking to individuals--in their homes, on street corners--anywhere they found someone who would listen. Further, they had managed huge sums of money frugally, they had supervised other campaigners efficiently, and they had made no enemies among the opposing candidate's entourage. In every way, both Melvin and Maggie had demonstrated unusually strong talents in leadership.

**A** grave emergency arose, and the owner was called away on a journey to a far country. Not having had time to orient his new employees to their responsibilities, he called them together and bade them use their talents in a seemingly

manner and do their best in handling his business affairs while he was away. The owner was known to all his employees as an extremely hard-working and successful salesman who never asked his employees to do anything he wouldn't be willing to do himself. Appreciative of the owner's high standards, the new employees resolved to show themselves worthy of his confidence by means of their conduct while he was away.

When the owner returned, he called each employee into his office to review all accomplishments and decide on appropriate rewards.

"Melvin, you have amazed me with your industry and good judgment. It is apparent that your talents were not overestimated in your recommendations and you've skillfully adapted them to use in my employ. Not only have you exceeded your sales quota, but also, by your pep-talks in weekly sales meetings, you have inspired several of your co-workers to do the same. I'm going to double your salary and promote you to sales manager because of your demonstrated talent for leadership.

"Clifford, you have faithfully attended all the weekly sales meetings, you have fulfilled your sales quota, and at the same time, I've been told, you found several ways in which our business expenses could be cut down. I'm going to double your salary and promote you to business manager because you have done more than I asked you to do.

"Victor, you have been faithful in keeping the offices and committee rooms clean, but you've never attended a sales meeting and you haven't made a single sale. Collect the salary that's owing to you and clean out your desk and locker. I know you're a very modest and timid person, but you should have attended the

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weekly sales meetings and tried to learn to sell, at least.

"Vera, you have initiated the practice of serving coffee and doughnuts at every sales meeting. Furthermore, you were always willing to wash the cups during sales meetings, to wipe the tables off and throw the coffee grounds away. You're such a dedicated employee I'm going to double your responsibilities. As you know, Victor isn't with us any more. You will be in charge of janitorial services as of today. Just submit your requests for supplies to Clifford. He will make the final decision about what to buy. I know you won't have time to attend the weekly sales meetings, but don't worry. We don't hold you responsible for making any sales.

**C**lara, you have faithfully attended all the weekly sales meetings, you have fulfilled your sales quota, and you've been helping Vera and Victor whenever they needed you. You have certainly shown yourself able to do what is expected of you. I'm going to ask Clifford to organize a women's training program and let you double your value to my company by teaching others to do the same as you have done. Be sure to check out your lesson plans for the training program with Clifford. Of course, you will no longer have time to attend the weekly sales meetings, but don't worry. We won't hold you responsible for making any sales.

"Maggie, you have exceeded your sales quota by as much as Melvin has. However, Clifford has complained about how pushy you seem to be. It offended him when you objected to his recommendation that all sales persons use the city bus service for transportation instead of a company car. He was embarrassed when you described your sales tactics during sales meetings because he thought you were deliberately drawing attention to the fact that you'd sold much more than he. Melvin has reported that you even volunteered to get up and give a pep-talk in front of the entire group of employees.

"When you joined our company, I had no idea you'd expect to behave the same as you did before I hired you. I would have expected someone with your capabilities to become an office manager instead. If you had taken over Clifford's bookkeeping duties and helped him with appointments and correspondence, he might have

had more time to devote to sales. Perhaps he would even have prepared pep-talks for the weekly sales meetings. Collect the salary that's owing to you and clean out your desk and locker. It is clear to me that you're unable to adapt your talents to the company mold."

Now Maggie might have elected to return to her former occupation as a political campaigner, but she did not. The fact is, she had become so thoroughly convinced of the value of the company product that she wanted to use her talents to promote sales in any way she could. She thought the entire situation over very carefully.

"It looks as if, by using my talents the way I did in my old job, I may cause Clifford and Melvin to be less effective than they might otherwise be," she thought. "However, if I leave the company, Clifford and Melvin will have much more to do than they can possibly achieve. I know I will feel disloyal to the company if I don't do all that I believe I can do to improve the product and promote its sale, but I guess I should lay my own view of loyalty aside. The most expedient thing for me to do, it seems, is to become the office manager after all. Perhaps I could write speeches for Clifford once in awhile. Of course, I wouldn't have time to attend the weekly sales meetings any more, but I guess they don't really hold me responsible for making any sales."

**T**he next day Maggie appeared in the owner's office to beg for one more chance to serve his company. "I would like to become your office manager," she said. "If you allow me to attend the weekly sales meetings, I'll take notes for Clifford and Melvin, but even if I have to bite my tongue to keep from it, I won't ask any questions or give any advice. If you want me to, I'll be glad to give pep-talks for the women's training programs--but about the importance of serving coffee, not the techniques for promoting sales. I've thought very carefully about the best way of using my talents in your service. It helped to remember something you said quite awhile ago about shedding any personal attributes that interfered with one's effectiveness.

"In my former position as campaign manager, I was able to speak convincingly to large audi-



ences and persuade them to change their beliefs. I was fearless in meeting strangers, winning their confidence, and converting them to our cause. I thought I could be helpful in teaching your employees to do the same. I haven't yet come to understand why my doing these things is interfering with my effectiveness, but I do see now that, in order to be accepted as an employee of your company it is necessary for me to shed the very attributes I thought you'd hired me to use."

"Now, Maggie," said the owner. "I know the sacrifice of talents like yours effectively cuts my sales force by half. Remember, though, that our company's image is so powerful I don't need to worry about the number of employees I have. Why, the founder of this company once fired all but 300 employees and still waged a highly successful campaign."

"Well," said Maggie, "I want more than anything else to be loyal to the company, so I will try to do as you say. But I'll always have difficulty determining when it would be unseemly to offer my ideas and services and when it would be disloyal to hold them back. I hope you realize that it would be much easier for me if you would put out my eyes and ears and cut off my tongue."

"Maggie!" said the owner. "Then you wouldn't be useful to me at all. Trust me. I'll show you some ways you can put your talents to work. I'll also help you with the delicate business of knowing when to speak up and when to hold your tongue. And don't forget how I distribute my bonuses. Remember that anyone who has been serving humbly and quietly behind the scenes has been promised to be among the first in line when the bonuses are handed out at the end of the fiscal period."

**I**'ll try," said Maggie, "I promise I'll try. But tell me this. Have you asked any of your male employees to make a sacrifice as difficult as the one you're asking of me?"

"Ah, Maggie," said the owner, shaking his head sadly. "If Melvin and Clifford become vice-presidents of the company tomorrow, or if they both die of heart attacks next week because of overwork, what is that to you? This is your contract we're talking about, not theirs."

"I don't mean for you to think I'm trying to

challenge your authority," said Maggie reassuringly. "And I don't want to imply that Melvin and Clifford couldn't handle their responsibilities without my advice. But surely you know that my highest aim in life is to follow your example in serving the company. You gave your life in its service, but you're asking me to hold back most of mine. I'll sign the contract, and I'll do my best to fulfill its terms, but I want you to know that I don't understand your policy, and I wish I could find words to tell you how frustrated I feel. When I sign this contract, it makes me feel unwanted, superfluous, patronized, useless--I feel as if I'm agreeing to behave as if I were someone else."

"I have a lot of confidence in my abilities, and I believe I should be doing much more than you're expecting of me. I feel sure I could do Melvin's job at least as well as he can, and I think the challenge would help me grow professionally. To me, it seems terribly unfair that I'm not allowed the same opportunity to grow as he is--in fact, it may even be illegal. I'm positive I read a notice somewhere which identified you as an Equal Opportunity Employer."

**W**ell, Maggie," said the owner, "suppose that is our ideal, and suppose we are slowly but surely moving toward that goal. I could only urge you to be patient for now. If I made you sales manager instead of Melvin today, it wouldn't be the same for you anyway. The other employees would feel awkward coming to you for advice. They wouldn't have the same confidence in you as they do in Melvin. I'm afraid most of them would actually leave this company and look for employment somewhere else. No matter how capably you could serve the company in some other capacity, can't you see we have more to lose than gain if we begin now to allow you to do any job you're able to do?"

"I see but I don't see," responded Maggie. "Why can't the other employees be expected to adapt themselves to change? Can't they be led to feel compassionate because these restrictions are so difficult for me? Has anyone even tried to empathize? I can adjust to my present situation. I'll find an outlet for my administrative energies in some outside activity. I will learn to be content. But I don't understand why it has to be this way! I may never understand!"



Renewal in the Pulpit

# Why Preachers Should Speak Out Positively on the Role of Women

By KATHY BERRY

Few preaching ministers in the Churches of Christ seem to feel that the issue of woman's role in church and society is of sufficient importance to warrant preaching sermons on the subject. Although many have concluded after scholarly and prayerful personal study that the church's traditional view of woman's role is unsound, most seem to have decided for one reason or another to maintain silence on the subject.

Many ministers may assume that the traditional restraints which the church has placed upon women are of minor significance, and are detrimental only to those very few women who strongly desire leadership or preaching positions in the church. Such an assumption could not be farther from the truth. To all women whose goals and aspirations are based on theological considerations, the roles and responsibilities which God has intended for the female Christian are crucial. One's understanding of God's purposes determines the direction of one's existence, not only for a few hours a week when the church assembles, but for a lifetime.

A major obstacle to open discussion has been the difficulty many pulpit ministers have experienced in internalizing the results of their study and research. Emotional acceptance of intellectual conclusions on an issue as volatile as woman's role may be extremely difficult for both

the preacher and his audience, and may require considerable patience and prayer.

Of course those primarily responsible for proclaiming by word and deed the freedom in Christ for female Christians are the Christian women who preach a more powerful sermon by their bold and courageous lives than could ever be conveyed by mere words from a pulpit. However, public discussion of God's plan and design for female Christians is urgently needed. Since females are currently banned from the brotherhood pulpits, male preaching ministers must somehow face up to their fears and emotions and encourage responsible discussion of an issue which has caused and continues to cause considerable and needless heartache among people earnestly seeking God's will.

There are at least four reasons why a preaching minister should openly urge re-examination of that body of church tradition which holds that no female Christian may preach, lead public prayer, lead singing, teach adult males, function as a church leader, or share equal responsibilities with her husband in managing a family.

1. *Sermons are needed on the misunderstood role of women to counter the pervasive symbolic teaching that woman is inferior to man.*

The pervasive attitude in the church that woman is an inferior being is symbolically taught

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throughout the public worship services. Consider the five-year-old girl who is led to believe that she is somehow deficient when only five-year-old boys are allowed to pass the communion tray to the adults during children's worship service. The junior high girl will undoubtedly realize her inferior status as she quietly observes her male classmates being trained for future leadership in the church. And there is the mother who discovers that she is no longer allowed to teach a Bible lesson in the presence of her pubescent son, or that her even younger son is allowed to usher and serve communion to the assembled congregation—opportunities which were foreclosed to her at birth.

The female Christian's sense of worth, self confidence, and self esteem are undermined when she is taught to believe herself to be inherently inferior to male Christians. While men are taught to base their self esteem upon their belief that they were created in the image of God to have dominion over the earth, women are taught that they were created for some ill-defined lesser purpose, their dreams and aspirations to be forever limited by any real or apparent "usurpation"

**While men base their self esteem upon their belief that they were created in the image of God to have dominion over the earth, women are taught that they were created for some ill-defined lesser purpose.**

over men. Jesus may have died for the sins of Adam, but freedom from the burden of the sins of Eve awaits alleviation in the hereafter.

The woman trying to fill the traditional role finds her sense of direction in life skewed and disjointed. The formulation of specific long-term goals is discouraged. She must realize her dreams and aspirations only by vicariously experiencing the goals and achievements of others—her husband and children. If her vicarious involvement becomes too strong, she is considered a pushy intermeddler.

After careful study and prayer over a period of time, the preaching minister has a duty to preach what he believes to be the truth concerning the role of the female Christian. A mere avoidance of sermons espousing the church's traditional view of women will not discharge this responsibility, since his silence will most likely be construed as an affirmation of the status quo.

Public worship services should be designed to build people up, not to put down half the congregation.

2. *The preaching minister should openly urge re-examination of that body of church tradition which causes conscientious women to believe that burying their God-given talents is the mark of a virtuous woman.*

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 applies equally to male and female Christians. To measure which talents a woman should use, measure those talents which she has been given. God determines what we can do by granting talents, and we have an obligation to use them. No one person or group of persons has the authority to determine which talents must be exercised or ignored by the female Christian. A female Christian is under no obligation to bury, waste, and lose those talents which do not fit into someone's amorphous conception of a female role.

Female Christians have lacked the confidence and opportunity to fully develop their talents. So many abilities have been lost through non-use

and neglect that one wonders how many female Christians would be able to assume leadership positions in the church if the barriers to full participation by female Christians were eliminated tomorrow.

3. *The congregation which unnecessarily relegates female Christians to a limited and inferior role will experience increasing difficulty in maintaining credibility in outreach and evangelistic efforts.*

As the talents and abilities of women are increasingly used in our society, a church's adherence to a theory of some mysterious and inherent spiritual inferiority in women appears more and more unsupportable. The church will not only be handicapped in outreach efforts, but also in its efforts to retain current members, many of whom will find the position on women so untenable that they decide to place membership elsewhere. Female Christians who handle con-



siderable responsibilities in everyday life will simply lose patience with a brotherhood which continues to relegate them to a status equal to and in some cases lower than, children.

4. *The traditional view leaves the conscientious woman adrift in a sea of uncertainty and guilt.*

Assuming for a moment that women were created for a lesser role, one looks in vain for clarification of that role beyond biological motherhood.

Should a female Christian's activity never threaten (i.e. "usurp") any man's efforts? Just all male Christians' activities? Just her Christian husband's? What about the non-Christian husband? A teenage boy? When? In church only? Only at home? At work?

Should a married Christian woman freeze her development of business acumen when her ability approaches that of her husband? Is it usurpation for a wife to earn more money than her husband earns? What about her education? Is it wrong for her to have more degrees than her husband has? How does she measure the use of her

talents—by her limitations or his?

Are the limitations computed differently if the female Christian is not married?

Is usurpation excused on a temporary or emergency basis, e.g. when the husband suffers a stroke, senility, or mental illness?

In short, what can a female Christian do with her life to accomplish something and yet not encroach upon some man's "authority"?

Such questions are answerable only by the development of an adequate method of Bible interpretation. If preaching ministers would re-examine the issue of woman's role and biblical interpretation, they could contribute significantly to an urgent need.

Finally, in urging re-examination of church traditions concerning the role of women, the preaching minister must be especially careful not to deprecate the enormous contributions which have been made by those women who have lived their lives within the strict confines of the traditional role. Rather, the emphasis should be that we are all now free to press on toward the goal of "neither male nor female. . . all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). †



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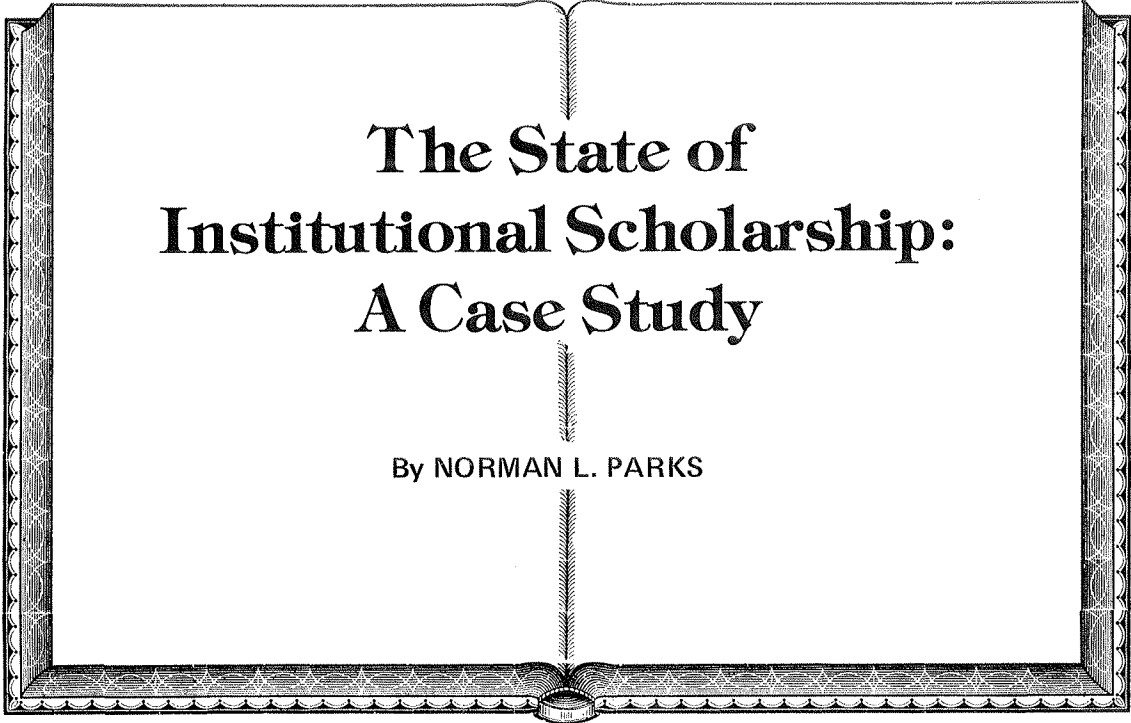
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# The State of Institutional Scholarship: A Case Study

By NORMAN L. PARKS

Various approaches to the question of the role of women in the church have raised incidentally other serious questions. With the multiplication of advanced degrees in religion (including the doctorate) in Church of Christ colleges and graduate schools, it is pertinent to ask, "Can a genuinely free and independent scholarship flourish on such topics in these institutions? Or must research and writing on Bible subjects be held safely within the clearly marked confines of Church of Christ 'orthodoxy'?"

It would seem that with their identification with the concept of the "restoration" of New Testament Christianity, there would be a primary concern with scholarly literature on the first century faith and its setting. But, judging from the published articles and books coming from these sources over the past decade, we can look for nothing more pioneering and challenging than what we hear weekly from the contemporary pulpit. There may be a show of scholarship on

esoteric subjects in theological jargon, likely from the Old Testament, in which doctrinal matters are of little concern. But when it comes to matters touching on tests of "soundness," such as church music, the rule of elders, fellowship, and the role of women in the assembly, the productions are reaffirmations of stale orthodoxy.

Illustrative of this, I think, are two articles entitled "The Role of Women in Religious Services" by Neil Lightfoot in *The Firm Foundation*, March 15 and 22, 1977. (Dr. Lightfoot was recognized by the Abilene Christian board as Teacher of the Year in 1978.)

## I.

It would seem that a scholarly approach to this subject would have to recognize first that there are barriers which stand in the way of a male-dominated church's understanding the New Testament teaching on women. They are: (1) Our machismo secular culture, imbibed from infancy, which regards men more seriously than women, rewards them more highly, and leads us to seek support in the Bible for these cultural priorities. (2) Our proof-text method, in which we isolate a passage from its literary and historical setting

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and make it into an absolute norm in disregard of other passages. (3) The male bias imbedded in the various translations of the Bible, as in the account of Pentecost in which the word "men" is added when absent in the Greek, and in Paul's introduction of Phoebe as a deacon to the disciples at Rome. (4) Our lack of a solid understanding of everyday Greek of the first century, apart from the standard lexicons. (5) Our limited knowledge of the problems which the Pauline letters present to us and the need for much more research into the settings of these problems at Corinth, Ephesus, and Crete where problems about women arose.

Apart from a reference to a "textual difficulty" and a possible "transposition" in 1 Corinthians, Dr. Lightfoot apparently sees no difficulty in delineating woman's role in religious meetings. Even more serious, he does not ask if the situations at Corinth and Ephesus were special situations different from the norm and requiring special handling by Paul. Instead, he treats them as the norm, totally ignoring the remarkably active role of women in the church pictured in other parts of the New Testament and imposing on all women of all time and at all

solved purely at the instance of the husband. No rabbi would waste words on a woman. They could not study the Law. They could not teach, even the children.

But Jesus met women as equals. He placed marriage on a new basis. He accepted them as disciples. In part, at least, women funded his travels. To women fell the honor of proclaiming the resurrection. They were a part of the Galilean "synagogue" of 120 who met and prayed and waited for power from on high. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended on them and on the head of each was the tongue of flame. They spoke in foreign tongues and prophesied, Peter testifying to the fact. Paul would not have hurried Christian women off to jail if they had been the "silent" spectators demanded by Dr. Lightfoot.

Women helped select the seven trustees at Jerusalem to care for the common fund. They helped make the great decision at Jerusalem that Gentiles did not have to become Jews in order to be Christians. Four virgin daughters of Phillip "preached the word." Phoebe was not only a deacon (not "deaconess") in the church at Cenchreae, she was something of a "manager" (the

**The situations at Corinth and Ephesus are treated  
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places the "veil" of silence at assembly.

The author fails to come to grips with the bizarre situation at Ephesus reflected in 2 Timothy, which sheds light on why certain women were "domineering over" men to the disruption of orderly meetings. Neither does he ask obvious questions about such references as "the law," and the translation of "women" instead of "wives" in 1 Corinthians 14:34. His two articles therefore add no new light on the subject, but rather reinforce an existing but unbiblical doctrine governing women in the religious life.

The place of women in the church cannot be pictured without taking in the larger picture presented in the New Testament. The New Covenant brought to women a revolutionary freedom, both in the home and in the church. They had no place at all in the Jewish synagogue except as isolated spectators. The marriage could be dis-

Greek is the very word used to describe the role of elders). All of the Gentile churches were in debt to Phoebe.

Did not Christ fulfill the "Nazareth Charter" to "set at liberty them that are bruised" by releasing women from the degradation of the Adam Age? Did they not find a new sense of personal value and the freedom to fulfill their potential under the New Covenant? God poured out his Spirit upon them and they prophesied. Surely God, after giving them this active role, would not withdraw it and reduce them to Dr. Lightfoot's silence.

Paul himself assures us in Galatians 3:28 that sex is no more a determinant of one's role or status in the church than is race or social status. This is borne out by the many factual statements about active women in the early church. "Euodia" worked side by side with Paul in the promo-



tion of the gospel. Certainly the Holy Spirit showed no discrimination in sex in awarding his gifts. Women could teach firebrands like Apollos, and have churches in their own home.

Also, Paul presents marriage as a partnership of equals in 1 Corinthians 11, with decisions being arrived at by common agreement. Though man was "head" of the woman (the Greek word *kephale* means "source" here according to many scholars), because he was created first, woman is now the source of man. Elsewhere Paul sums up their relationship with the instruction, "Be subject to one another."

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In view of this revolutionary change, it is not surprising that there were some women who failed to grasp the full meaning of their liberation and abused the liberty that is in Christ Jesus. The surprising thing is that there was so little abuse. It is in this kind of light that the situations at Corinth and Ephesus need to be studied, as special situations. This, I think, is the conspicuous failure of Dr. Lightfoot.

## II.

Can we deduct from 1 Corinthians 14 the universal rule that women must without exception be silent in church, as Dr. Lightfoot insists? I think not, because Paul did not impose silence on all women even in the Corinthian church, but on certain wives who were interrupting male speakers with questions and remarks. This was either at religious assemblies, where the speakers were probably husbands, who were preaching, or at the municipal assemblies, where it was considered a disgrace for a woman to be heard. In any case, it was indecorous, and they were instructed to ask their husbands at home. I had assumed that almost all scholars agreed that the proper translation of 1 Corinthians 14:34 should be: "Let wives be silent in assembly; they are not allowed to speak."

Moreover, these wives were not the only ones instructed to be silent at Corinth. Prophets and tongue-speakers also received this instruction, probably both male and female, since we have

observed that these gifts were distributed without regard for sex. There were special situations that Paul had to deal with in a realistic way. In both cases, it seems to me, he is not dealing in sweeping, unchanging norms, but in a practical way to establish order and respect for each other.

What about the reference in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 to "as even the law says"? Dr. Lightfoot unquestioningly assumed that this is a reference to the Law of Moses, as is implied in some translations by its capitalization. But the Law of Moses contains no decree that seems to fit the Corinthian situation, and it is questionable to re-

sort to the classification of the whole Old Testament as "the Law and the Prophets." On this basis Dr. Lightfoot finds Paul using Genesis 3:16 ("Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you") as a weapon to force silence on all women.

This is suspect on a number of grounds. God did not impose this male lordship on wives, nor was it in keeping with his will. Genesis 3:16 was not the command of God, but the consequence which Eve brought on herself; God merely told her what was forthcoming. If this "ruling over" is God's eternal, unchanging law for women, then Dr. Lightfoot will need to explain why he let man off the hook of struggling with briars and thistles and permits him to make his living in an air-conditioned office.

Moreover, it needs to be asked whether the "law" to which Paul referred might not have been the municipal law of Corinth. This Roman-founded, polyglot city had a vigorous municipal life with frequent public assemblies. Since women prayed and preached in the religious assembly at Corinth (albeit with their heads covered with the veil), could not Paul have been talking about the municipal assembly?

I am not persuaded that in chapter 11 Paul put no restraints on women praying and preaching other than the wearing of the veil, but in chapter 14 he reversed himself and imposed an unbroken silence on all women, as Dr. Lightfoot insists. Nor am I persuaded by the argument that



prophesying was a temporary thing, but silence was the fundamental and permanent rule which supplanted the temporary practice. If God could use women by giving them the gift of prophecy, why cannot he use them today when he places in their hands the book inspired by the Holy Spirit? Objectivity would have to acknowledge that far more research into first century Corinth is needed, and that closing the book with Dr. Lightfoot's finality is a failure in scholarship.

### III.

Dr. Lightfoot's handling of the Ephesian situation seems to me to be even more inadequate. I was pleased to see that he accepted Moffatt's translation of 1 Timothy 2:12 as "domineer over" instead of "have authority over,"\* This should have suggested to him such extreme behavior by some women as to call forth from Paul a strong reprimand.

The connotation here is much stronger than mere domineering, carrying the feeling of arrogance and hostility. And what Paul asks for here is not "silence" in church, but the opposite qualities these women were exhibiting. What he asks for of these women is exactly what he asks the church to pray for in 1 Timothy 2:1—"peace and quiet." This is far from silence.

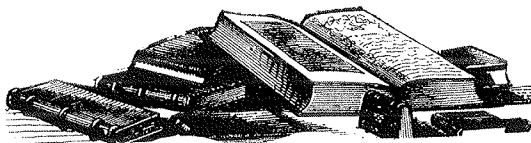
What we need to ask is why women were behaving this way at Ephesus. Second Timothy gives us important leads. There were dangerous teachers who had come to the city with false doctrines that ate their way like gangrene. They taught that the resurrection had already come. Apparently they also taught the doctrine which Paul corrected at Corinth, that the truly spiritual life is above sex and women ought to deal with their husbands accordingly. These false teachers gained access to whole families through gullible wives. Apparently their converts were laying down the law to the males in the Ephesian assembly. Paul urged Timothy to deal with this ugly, aggressive behavior. He wanted peaceful, decent behavior of these women, just as he did of the men, who were to lift their hands reverently in prayer, "with no anger or argument."

Not only is it totally incorrect to deduce from this situation a blanket rule of silence; it is most dubious to draw from it a rule that denies women the right to teach. At this very church Prisca taught Apollos. What Paul was dealing with was apparently both the manner and content of some women activists who tried to penetrate the Christian community with what they had learned from their sinister teachers. Certainly the object of prophecy is to inform and convert, and women were doing that all over the Christian landscape.

It is obvious that we need to know much more about the influences working at Ephesus than we now know before we lay down universals governing contemporary women in the church. I am persuaded that when this knowledge comes, we will discover that there will be no conflict between Paul's handling of the situations at Corinth and Ephesus and his broad principle governing male-female relationships in Galatians 3:28 and Ephesians 5:21. The latter is a great topical sentence which sums up its following paragraph. Its message is that male-female relationships are not superordinate-subordinate, but one of mutual subjection: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Now the possibility remains that with reference to these two special situations in the Bible, I may be wholly wrong and Dr. Lightfoot wholly right. But the really important thing is that Dr. Lightfoot could not be wrong by the standards of orthodoxy prevailing at his institution and remain there. For this reason I am not optimistic about pioneering work at such institutions under present administrative leadership. We will need to look elsewhere.

\*The male bias in translation shows itself strongly in the preference for "have authority over" instead of the rare and much more accurate "domineer over" or "dictate to" in NEB and Moffatt. The "subordination" school of thought holds that though a woman is not to have authority over men, it is decreed that man is to have authority over women. They would be reluctant to admit that man should "domineer" or "dictate." The biblical truth is that neither should have authority over the other. Under the reign of God, relationships—of husbands and wives, of men and women, of elders and non-elders—rests wholly on something other than authority. †





*An Unmarried Woman.* Written and directed by Paul Mazursky.  
Main stars: Jill Clayburgh, Michael Murphy, and Alan Bates.

# MOMIES

## Women's Plight: an Adequate but not Profound Guide

Several times recently we have noted on these pages a number of outstanding films which express special sensitivity toward the plight of the modern woman (e.g., *Annie Hall*, *The Turning Point*, *Julia*). It seems fitting with the current interest in the study of women in society as a special subject that Paul Mazursky, a producer of some of the more interesting film treatments of modern family life (remember Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice) should try his hand in this area. What emerges is a sensitive, more than adequate film, slightly flawed at times, which challenges us by the magnitude of the issues about woman as a peculiar person, as she takes it upon herself to develop her own philosophy of the world.

The setting for this film is in New York City. This contributes both positively and negatively toward the impact of the film. The oppressiveness and general malaise of city life is a good backdrop for a film about a woman who has to cope with a divorce. In such environments it is difficult to maintain belief in the existence of traditional moral absolutes about the sanctity of the family. So, it is no surprise when early in the film Erica (Jill Clayburgh) is told by her rather well-to-do stockbroker husband that he wants a divorce. The viewer is tempted to say, "What's new? This is the norm for city existence today, isn't it?" This feeling that there is

something awry in the life of continual mobility is intensified dramatically by the specific locus of the scene. Erica gets the fateful news about the intended divorce while the couple are jogging.

Yet the New York City setting as the backdrop to Erica's experience, in comparison with that of others, does tend to tinge the film with a dimension of unreality. It is one thing if Erica were left to cope with the persistent demands of urban existence in Brooklyn, Queens, or the Bronx; but it is quite another to look forward to a new life as a cultural sophisticate who lives with adequate financial sources in a beautiful Manhattan apartment with only one child to raise. Most women who are divorced are forced to live in less commodious surroundings, not in salons. They must earn a living, and tight budgets leave little room for the cultivation of various expensive aesthetic activities. Yet, in her own way, Erica is quite an interesting paradigm of a modern woman who chooses to survive. The emphasis is on autonomy and interiority. Freed from some of the material crises of life, she is able to explore and reflect upon the experience of being alone among millions.

In this fragile setting, Erica gradually develops a semblance of wholeness. She never succumbs to self-pity. She even survives the company of the most shrewish group of friends since

those would-be theologians sought to advise Job.

Of course to add dramatic interest there is an affair—in this case with a British artist (Alan Bates). Bates is superb in his acting, but in the flow of the film he is defined by Erica in the role he plays in her recovery. Thus, the message of the film unfolds; when the sensitive woman is in total dependence upon others in the contemporary situation, she is liable to be left in the lurch. "Enlightened autonomy" is the best way of looking at the world. She must realize that a variety of experiences, some negative and some positive, may come her way. In the end she must act sensibly (not necessarily always responsibly) and be thankful for the little things that make life bearable.

All of this sounds very much like the theology of Ecclesiastes with which, I suspect, Mazursky would be very comfortable. Like Ecclesiastes, Erica is oblivious to most of the great dramatic realities of human existence, such as sin, alienation, atonement, redemption, and resurrection. These themes have stirred the passions and feelings of human beings through the ages. Erica lives without them in a more restricted view of reality. For a witty and sensitive description of the state of being alone, *An Unmarried Woman* does well. But it still remains only a surface guide to the profound questions which one must encounter upon true reflection of interiority. †

# FORUM

## The Law and the Illogical

In the September issue of *Mission*, Gene Shelburne nails the Law of Moses to the cross ("By Man Shall His Blood Be Shed"). Then he carefully selects quotes from the Old Testament and manages to come up with one of the illogical conclusions so loved by theologians, claiming that the writings before the time of Moses are eternal and should be in force today. What about the law of the Sabbath, and Genesis 2:2? You can't get much further back than this. Does he, therefore, observe the Sabbath? What does he do about this day God sanctified so early in time?

If he wants to quote the Old Testament on murder, why does he entirely omit Genesis 4 and the first story of murder recorded in the Bible? He claims, "God's rule that a murderer should die for his crime is one of those early, eternal laws (p. 7)." Then he insults those opposed to capital punishment as being "nicer than God." What was God's own punishment of the first murderer? Nicier than Shelburne, I would say. And who shed the blood of the murderer David?

In order to support his desire for capital punishment he even goes in for killing witches and owners of oxen who run loose and kill. A car out of control would be our equivalent of the loose oxen. And we don't have cities of refuge.

As for witches, theologians and government officials were not "too squeamish" (p. 8) to burn them at the stake, torture them on the rack, hang them, press them to death, drown them, and torture them in other ways. It is estimated that more than nine million persons were cruelly killed as witches during the Christian era before the eighteenth cen-

tury. The whole population was much smaller at that time; so this figure shows that the innocent human suffering was as widespread as frightening. This is what happens when the clergy and the government have the power of life and death over the subjects.

Is the writer hoping to renew this blood-thirsty desire for violence? What other motive could lead him to say, "Now don't get sidetracked by pleading that these are Old Testament verses" (p. 8)? What is Shelburne's idea of Romans 12:17—"Recompense to no man evil for evil"? And of Romans 12:19—"Avenge not yourselves . . . for it is written vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord"?

Why would *Mission* print such an article?

Annie Woodbridge  
Carbondale, Illinois

*We printed the article because it seems a responsible statement of the view favoring capital punishment, just as we printed a responsible opposing view in the same issue.*

## Now We Know

I had almost despaired of anyone's being able to *know* the will of God for many today, when along came Gene Shelburne's article, "By Man Shall His Blood Be Shed."

Obviously a profound theologian, Gene demonstrated his knowledge of God's deepest intentions when he used phrases such as, "God's way," "God's plan," "God's will," "God intends," and "God's wrath." After hearing Gene ask, "Do we feel like he does?", and then state, "God is not like that," I knew that brother Gene had finally attained the ultimate state for mortals, the ability to read God's mind and know God's feelings.

I rest contentedly now, assured by Gene that God is small enough to

understand. It's good to know there is at least one of us who is among those "who bring their god in their hand." (Job 12:6)

Richard Schramm  
Dallas, Texas

## I Have Less Tolerance

Re. Cross Currents (September issue), I must compliment the good brother on his magnanimity toward his elders (and their condemnation of his marriage). He said, "I guess I'll stay with them and go to hell." My reaction would have been much different, like getting out of there and telling *them* where to go.

Jim Smith  
Bedford, Texas

## Needs Are Being Met

I just want you to know how much I have appreciated and been blessed by the last two or three issues of *Mission*. I have always enjoyed reading it, but recently there have been some articles and letters that have truly met my special needs at this time. I believe you are doing a valuable work for us in the churches of Christ and pray God to continue to bless your ministry in *Mission*.

Douglas Hale  
Lubbock, Texas

## On Dodger Theology

G. James Robinson has done a nice work of comparative religion in his "Dodger Theology and the Church" (August issue). What scares me is that he is probably right: many people do experience a higher level of love, fellowship, and emotion in sports than in church. I suspect that this means, however, that we do not have the foggiest idea of what Christianity means. Now I know why I like the Astros.

Steven Spidell  
Wilmette, Illinois



# ←CROSS CURRENTS→

Most discussions of the role of women in the church eventually come 'round to a distinction between their public or "formal" roles, and what they can do in private. A Priscilla might draw aside an Apollos and teach him the way of the Lord more perfectly, but only in private (and, somewhat contradictorily, in the company of an Aquila). Women in Corinth might have been given the gift of prophecy, but this is somehow construed as a private function. Some are willing to grant that women prayed in Corinth, but they argue that this was not "leading in prayer." The real barriers seem to be that of the public service, and taking a leading role there.

If our aim is to do right by God's women, this situation lends itself to an astonishingly simple solution: *ban all "formal services," and drop such terms as "leading in worship."*

This is not asking too much of a truly biblical people, for neither notion is found in the Bible. Scripture speaks of no "worship services," for all of life is conceived as both worship and service. Christ's presence is as real where two or three are gathered in his name as in the giant throngs. And as for "leading the service," the field was wide open in the assemblies in Corinth. Paul's concern was that too many *persons*—not males or females—were speaking out in confusion.

As heresy threatened the early church, only "designated hitters" were allowed to bat—without the precedent of either Scripture or modern baseball. The right to be heard in the assembly began to be restricted to that institution Restorationists railed most against—the *clergy* (just as in most Churches of Christ today). Over-strict application of Paul's concern that all be done "decently and in order" soon made impossible the marvelous and enthusiastic chaos of a Corinthian assembly. And in our churches there is certainly order—spiritless, predictable, deadly order.

So I say, "Back to the Bible." Let us simply gather and worship, doing away with the late heresy of "formal" worship. Let us simply pray, instead of being concerned with the unscriptural question of what gender is "leading in prayer." And let us allow the word of God free course, leaving the suppression of women to those modernistic churches with ordained clergy.

How our Restoration forbears railed against these unbiblical traditions! And how odd that their heirs would defend as scriptural the custom of male dominance by appealing to formal and institutional categories which are themselves unscriptural.

—RD





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## **coming next month:**

ALLAN D. ROSS CRITIQUES THE MOONIES . . .

AND WARREN LEWIS, WHO TEACHES AT THEIR  
SEMINARY, TELLS WHY HE THINKS MOON  
IS A RELIGIOUS GENIUS.

NANCY MYERS SPEAKS OUT IN DEFENSE OF  
GOD'S SPECIAL PROVIDENCE,

AND ROY WILLBERN CONTINUES HIS SERIES  
ON THE WAY SCRIPTURE TREATS THE EQUALITY  
OF MALE AND FEMALE.